Worship Resources for July 13th, 2014—Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 25:19-34 or Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65 or Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

We continue our story of the first generations of the Israelites in our first thread from the Hebrew Scriptures in this season after Pentecost—we began with Abraham and Sarah, last week we read of Isaac and Rebekah, and this week, the birth of their twins, Esau and Jacob. From the beginning, we see that the two boys, though twins, are very different—different in appearance, interests, in which parent favorites them, and how they act in the world. Esau is rash, impulsive, while Jacob seems to take his time planning, and in doing so, gets Esau to sell his birthright.

Isaiah 55:10-13 is a blessing from God through the prophet Isaiah, that as God consistently renews the earth with rain, so God will renew the people. All of creation sings the praises of God and will celebrate with Israel upon their return from exile. God rejoices, and therefore creation rejoices, and God makes all things new.

Psalm 65 is a song of thanksgiving to God for the harvest, for all of creation. The psalmist praises God for the deliverance and forgiveness of the people, and also sings praises to God who is the creator, who calms the seas and builds up the mountains. God is the master gardener, and the world is abundant with life.

Psalm 119:105-112 praises God for the words of the law, the commandments and ordinances that have been given, and the psalmist finds delight in living out God’s law. The psalmist sings praises for the giving of the law, and aligns his heart to follow God’s ways.

Romans 8:1-11 is Paul’s discourse on life in the Spirit. With Christ, sin has no power, and we find freedom. Paul’s argument is that the law is needed because of the ways of the world, but that in Christ the ways of the world have no power over us and the law is no longer needed. We can have life now in the Spirit that leads to resurrection. It is not about life after death, but eternal life that begins now, a life in the Spirit in which sin and death have no power.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 contains the parable of the Sower and an explanation—the parable of the Sower is the only parable in the gospels that has an explanation given, though most scholars believe that was added later, as the rest of Jesus’ parables are given without answer or explanation. The explanation given leads us to wonder what kind of soil are we planted in, or what kind of seeds we might be. But we also might ask the question, how are our seeds cared for, and what can we do to nurture God’s seeds in us to yield greatly?

How do we live our lives in terms of what we have been given and what we find? Often we have ignored the privileges we have been born into, take them for granted, and see other’s struggles as of their own doing. When we look at Jacob and Esau, on the surface we see equals—we see one as rash and impulsive, one as thoughtful and patient. But when we look deeper into the story and find that each had a different parent that favored them, and we learn how Jacob steals Esau’s blessings, we find that our judgment may fall short—Jacob may have had the privilege of his mother’s knowledge of food and of Isaac’s desires to steal the blessing. It is easy to judge from the outside how someone lives their lives—but when we look deeper, we see that our own privileges may blind us to the experiences and struggles of others. We are called away from the judgments and expectations of this world into the life of the Spirit, in which we find freedom, and are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, and love God.

Call to Worship

Come away from the burdens of the world,

**Find rest in Jesus, and be renewed in the Spirit.**

Come away from the judgments of this world,

**Find freedom in Christ, and hope of new life now.**

Come away from the way of sin in this world,

**Love God, love your neighbor, and seek forgiveness.**

**Come, let us worship God, who leads us into new life. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Spirit, we confess that we have been caught up in the movements of this world, that cause us to seek our own gain, our own worldly success above the needs of others. We confess that we often judge others by our own lives, that others have not worked hard enough or lived the right way. Forgive us for our short-sightedness, our selfish smugness that asserts we are right and others are wrong. Forgive us for not living as if we are last of all and servant of all, as Christ has taught us. Lead us into the way of life, to seek the well-being of others, lifting up those who are in need, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In the name of Christ, our Teacher, our Redeemer and Friend, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God sets our feet on right paths. Every time we step away, we are given the opportunity to step back. Even when we stray further away, grace is available. God does not leave us. Know that God is with you, and will guide you home when you seek Christ. You are beloved by God, and God will not abandon you. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, guide us to live as You taught us, to serve one another, to love one another, and to help prepare for the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven. Help us to turn away from quick impulses and tempting gains, and to seek the needs of others and to live into Your commandments. May we learn from the ancient words of Scripture, the experiences of our ancestors in faith, but may we follow Your words in our heart, that continuously call us to seek out our brothers and sisters in need. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.